

## CHAPEL HISTORIES

**Haydn Davies**, *The Pound Chapel, Llanbister, Radnorshire, 1896-1996: Centenary Commemoration*, 48pp, 1996, np. Available from author, The Manse, Llanbadarn Ffynydd, Llandrindod Wells, Powys, LD1 6TU.

**Robert Gardiner**, *Within These Walls: A History of Stanwell Road Baptist Church, Penarth*, 1996, 123pp, np. Available from author, 3 Erw'r Delyn Close, Penarth, South Glamorgan, CF64 2TU.

**Peter Thatcher**, *Then and Now: Baptists in Chichester, 1648-1994*, Chichester Baptist Church, Chichester, West Sussex 1995, x + 84pp, np. ISBN 0 9525357 0 X.

To mark the centenary of the opening of the Pound Chapel (Hephzibah Baptist Chapel), Llanbister, in 1896, the present minister has written a Centenary Commemoration. For much of its life, it was known as Pound Aloes Chapel, the name 'Aloes' apparently a corruption of 'Alehouse' from the building opposite. The Alehouse was kept by the Morris family for generations and a Mrs Morris was chiefly responsible for establishing the work. Although a Calvinistic Methodist at the time, she invited the Revd David Davies, minister of Maesy rhelem Baptist Chapel in the adjoining parish of Llananno, to conduct services in her home once a month. Soon she and her husband were baptized. Services were conducted in their home until 1885 when a disused Primitive Methodist Chapel was rented at £1 per year. It was doubtful whether the new cause should be regarded as a branch of Maesy rhelem or Gravel: both churches presented their case and it was left to Mrs Morris to decide in favour of Maesy rhelem. During the early years the two deacons at Maesy rhelem also served Pound Aloes, but in 1887 two local men were appointed deacons. By 1887 there were forty-nine members but in late 1888 and early 1889 twenty-six converts were added. Increase in the congregation led to the erection of the present building, largely financed by Mrs Morris. During the Welsh Revival of 1905 forty-eight people were added to the church. When Richard Davies was succeeded by E.H. Dight as minister in 1910, the church was described as in 'a flourishing condition'. There was a good relationship with the local Anglican clergyman, who used to read the prayers at the Sunday afternoon service in summer, while the Squire announced the hymns.

Sadly the author could not find much information about the next four pastorates. Had he had access to the *Baptist Handbook* he would have realized that in 1922 the Revd W.R. Watkins became minister of Penithon as well as Maesy rhelem and Pound Aloes and the three churches have continued to share a minister until the present time. In 1984, during the pastorate of the Revd Ray [Ramon Charles] Roberts, a water supply was brought to the Pound Chapel for the first time and a toilet block was erected. There is a photograph of the official water-carrier bringing water to the chapel in 1964 for the Association half-yearly meetings.

The present pastorate began in 1991 and, although the author does not tell us, he also became the pastor of the Gravel Chapel. It was in this chapel that he held his first baptismal service in 1994 for a mother and her daughter from Pound. Previously baptisms for the Pound Chapel had taken place in the river: in 1905 the ice had to be broken first, but none of those baptized caught a cold as a result!

The author has faced considerable difficulty in the absence of adequate records. He quotes from a newspaper article from 1964, which also gives some information about the sister chapels of Penithon and Maesy rhelem. At the time the Penithon Chapel, also a former Methodist chapel at the head of the Ithon River, was only used once a month for communion services. It is said that when the Baptists acquired the building they closed the original windows in the end wall so that it resembled other Baptist chapels. The Maesy rhelem chapel is a former Quaker meeting-house with a burial ground; when the Quaker community dwindled, the building passed into Baptist hands. Baptisms took place in the adjacent river usually at Easter and Whitsun.

To mark one hundred years of witness at Pound the members planned to renovate the old stable beneath the schoolroom for use by the youth club and Sunday school. So the church seeks to meet the needs of the community today as in the past. Robert Gardiner had ample records to draw on in writing *Within These Walls*, including an unpublished history of Stanwell Road Baptist Church, Penarth, up to 1935, so he has been able to tell the story of the church in considerable detail. The history of any church can only be understood against the history of the community it serves. For centuries Penarth had been a small collection of farms and cottages but the building of Penarth harbour and its rail link to the coalfields led to growth. Amongst those who came to the town were Baptists, who first held services in a carpenter's shop and then built a chapel in Plassey Street on the site of the present Tabernacle. Opened in 1871, four years later it was too small to meet the needs of the expanding town: this was the pressing issue in the 1880s. The church opinion divided: some wanted to build afresh on a new site with scope for further expansion, while others wanted to rebuild on the existing site. A lease was acquired of the Stanwell Road site in the developing part of the town but the church, uncertain, sought guidance from the Revd Nathaniel Thomas, minister of Tabernacle, The Hayes, Cardiff. The church meeting decided by a clear majority that a new chapel should not be built until the potential of the existing site had been exhausted but a minority left to form a new church. After protracted negotiation by person and by letter, members of the Tabernacle handed the new site over to the breakaway group to begin a new work. Stanwell Road Baptist Church was formally constituted in 1886 and the Tabernacle gave a warm welcome to the new church which met on its premises until its own building was ready. One year later a schoolroom was opened and two extensions were built shortly afterwards. The church had its first baptistery and called its first minister in 1889.

The terms of the lease stated that a chapel was to be begun by 1893. The new church was reluctant to do this - understandable since membership stood at around eighty and the existing schoolroom seated three hundred. In the event the building went ahead and the new chapel was opened in May 1896. It was not until the end of World War I that the church was able to clear the mortgage on the buildings; freehold of the site was acquired in 1923.

The social changes following World War I brought changes in church life. The first two women deacons were appointed in 1919. Realizing that the church must broaden its social base if it was to prove relevant in the years to come, a motion was passed suggesting that, in addition to the two lady deacons, there should always be two deacons from the working classes, and in 1920 one deacon tendered his resignation on the grounds 'that there was a distinct feeling abroad that the labour element was needed on that body'.

The longest ministry in the church's history was that of the Revd Harry Hughes, 1935-1954, although during the war he was a naval chaplain. The church was initially unwilling for him to serve in this capacity no doubt recalling that in the previous war its minister did not return to Penarth after enlisting in the YMCA to work on the battlefields of France and then as an army chaplain.

The author admits to finding the recent history the most difficult to write. Despite some feeling that certain matters should be left out, he has included them because not to do so 'would have cast doubt on the truthfulness of every thing else in it'. So, for example, he deals at some length with the effect of the break-up of one minister's marriage, and with a difficult situation which arose when a member, having passed the Baptist Union Examinations, was ordained and inducted as assistant minister. The senior minister had a different view of the work of a 'supplementary minister' from that of the assistant, who eventually resigned and in due course became minister of Llandough Baptist Church.

Peter Thatcher, who has been the Church Secretary of the present Chichester Baptist Church, has written a fascinating account of Baptist work in Chichester. As early as 1648 there was a General Baptist community, after James Sicklemore, Rector of nearby Singleton, adopted Baptist views. Meetings took place first in a house and then in a chapel erected in 1671 off Eastgate Square, beside the River Lant where baptisms could take place. By 1656 the cause had come under the influence of Matthew Caffyn, with tendencies towards non-trinitarian theology. Around 1700 those who preached at the chapel differed: Thomas Croucher adopted Caffinite views, while Abraham Mulliner opposed them. This led in 1703 to Mulliner's call to be Elder of the General Baptist Church at White's Alley, Moorfield. During the eighteenth century the doctrinal position of the church is not known. At the end of that century, when the church was without a minister, a party of New Connexion General Baptists from Portsmouth took possession of the chapel but were ejected. John Foster, who is sometimes linked with the nursery rhyme 'Dr Foster went to Gloucester', was minister from 1797 to 1799. As he had been

trained at Bristol Baptist College, it is almost certain that his theology was trinitarian.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Eastgate Chapel had few members and no pastor. So in 1804 the congregation joined that of the nearby Presbyterian Chapel in Baffin's Lane, which owed its origin to two ejected ministers, John Willis and John Corbett. Eastgate was not formally disbanded until 1815. In 1849 Baffin's Lane divided and the Eastgate Chapel was re-opened as a General Baptist Church with John Hill as pastor until 1876 when the chapel was again closed. Baffin's Lane Chapel was also closed from 1861 to 1883. Both chapels were re-opened in 1883 and services took place in them alternately. In 1916 there were discussions between representatives of the Baptist Union and the British and Foreign Unitarian Association to determine the ownership of certain General Baptist chapels. It was agreed that Eastgate Chapel should be regarded as Unitarian so when the chapel was sold in 1954 the proceeds went to the Unitarians. The Baffin's Lane Chapel was sold in 1923 and so the Eastgate Chapel was used until the closure of regular services in 1940.

Peter Thatcher asks where those of Baptist persuasion in Chichester worshipped during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Baptists of a Calvinistic persuasion would have had much in common with the Independent (later Congregational) Chapel and Providence Chapel. It is interesting that William Woods, Pastor of Providence from 1875, 'did not believe in infant baptism, which he made clear before accepting the pastorate', and Providence appeared as an associated chapel in Strict Baptist Yearbooks over some period of time. Arminian Baptists may have worshipped in one of the three Methodist churches in Chichester during the early part of the twentieth century. The Open Brethren meeting at the Gospel Hall practised believers' baptism, while some at the Anglican St John's Church had been baptized as believers. After World War II there were Baptists worshipping in both the Congregational and Southgate Methodist Churches. Also, with the improved transport by the twentieth century it was possible to travel to other towns where there were Baptist churches.

The author's suggestion that Baptists joined other churches in Chichester is confirmed by a report in the Old Baptist Union's magazine, *New Testament Christianity* 10 (5), September 1900, p.77. Claud Coffin wrote, 'I am informed that for some 30 or more years those who once formed a Baptist cause have been scattered among the various existing denominations'. The Old Baptist Union began work in Chichester in 1899 but, despite initial encouragement, the cause did not prosper and had closed by August 1905.

In 1948 Peter Thatcher was asked, on the basis of the 1931 census figures, to identify places in West Sussex suitable for Baptist outreach. The survey revealed that Chichester was the only large town without a Baptist church. A number of Baptist families had moved into the area between 1948 and 1951, so it was decided to meet in the author's home on 9 February 1951 to 'discuss some form of Baptist

work in Chichester'. The invitations to this meeting had already been sent out when an article by the Revd A. Russell Smith appeared in the *Baptist Times* on places without Baptist churches, in which he suggested convening a meeting of Baptists in Chichester to form a Fellowship. The meeting agreed to hold morning services at the Coronation Hall and to make tentative enquiries about sites on new housing estates in Chichester. A Baptist church was formed in September 1951. In due course the present site was acquired and the building opened in September 1958. An Initial Pastorate Grant from the Baptist Union enabled the church to call its first minister in 1957. By the end of 1969 the building debt had been cleared and from January 1970 no further help with the minister's stipend was needed. The premises were extended in 1957.

The period from 1986 to 1989 was difficult, with a failure to come to a common mind about two important matters. With growing congregations, should the church redevelop its site or 'plant' another congregation? An architect was appointed to do a feasibility study on building and site, but a proposal for the fuller study he suggested did not receive the required two-thirds majority. In June 1988 the Church Meeting agreed to engage in some form of church planting and also, though not unanimously, to explore site development further but this was eventually shelved. The second and more contentious matter concerned leadership structures. Some favoured the appointment of elders with 'spiritual' duties, leaving the deacons to deal with administration and finance. There was no unanimity among the existing deacons and in January 1989 four stood down; no new deacons were appointed until November. A Special Church Meeting in September 1989 revised the Rules concerning leadership and responsibility, but failed to agree on revised Rules about the appointment of officers. This left the Rules in a somewhat contradictory state and a number withdrew their membership. The 1987 figure of 149 members fell to 111 in 1990. The Rules revision was finally completed in September 1991, although the author does not say in what significant respects they differ from earlier Rules. The church is now growing again: with 144 members at the end of 1994.

In 1987 the church had a teaching weekend led by Mrs May Clarke of 'Wholeness through Christ', with which the minister and his wife were actively associated. The reviewer would have appreciated some information about this organization. Did the teaching given relate in any way to the difficulties of this period? Was there any significance in inviting the Revd John Bedford and a team from Brandhall Baptist Church to the Church Conference Weekend in April 1986? Bedford and Brandhall were certainly associated with Charismatic Renewal (see Jeanne Hinton, 'A Church on the Move: Brandhall Baptist Church' in Graham Pulkingham et al., *Renewal: An Emerging Pattern*, Poole 1980, pp.130ff).

The author is to be congratulated on his painstaking account of Baptist witness in Chichester. *Then and Now* has an index and an Appendix gives a fascinating account of how the Revd James Sicklemore came to Baptist views.

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Charles W. Deweese, Ed., *Defining Baptist Convictions: Guidelines for the Twenty-First Century*, Providence House Publishers, Tennessee, 1996. 224 pages.

Issues of Baptist identity and convictions are common themes, certainly amongst Baptists of Europe and the USA. In our own context the debate gathered pace in the mid-1980s, following the publication of *A Question of Identity* by Brian Haymes, and continues to be explored in the European Baptist Federation through the document *What are Baptists?* (EBF Division for Theology and Education, 1993) and in the outcomes of our Denominational Consultation. In North America, whence this volume comes, the focus of the debate is within the family of churches which make up the Southern Baptist Convention. This book, which is a series of twenty essays, is written, with one exception, by well-known Baptists almost exclusively from North America, the majority of whom might be identified with what some call the 'moderate' wing of the Southern Baptist debate.

This volume is not the international contribution to key issues about Baptist convictions and identity one might have hoped for. Only two of the authors, our own John Briggs and William Brackney of McMaster Divinity College in Canada, are outside the milieu of the Southern Baptist family. There are no contributions from those who move principally within the other large Conventions in the USA - American Baptists, Progressive, General and National Baptists, for instance. Nor is the European debate taken into account. So, if you are looking for a contemporary global or at least western and northern perspective on Baptist convictions for a new millennium, a contemporary 'Henry Cook for the world', do not look here.

The essays themselves are worthy, and some fascinating, but they are generally bound by the particular focus of the Southern Baptist debate. This makes them interesting for those of us who follow events in the States and watch the issues emerge in publications such as *Baptists Today*. Here, many of those who feature in the events make their case. But the account lacks both a serious wrestling with an interpretation of the influence and significance of the Anabaptist world and the burgeoning of confidence of Baptist communities in the two-thirds world who have taken hold of certain key themes from the missionaries who have worked with them, but have also produced fresh insights and new understandings of the Baptist way of being church.

John Briggs in his essay comes nearest to helping us reflect on wider associating. Molly Marshall challenges us about the place and ministry of women in the believers' church. William Estep, a distinguished historian, has a strident challenge to those who use secular political processes to achieve religious goals. Bill Brackney helps us see the dangers of marketplace religion in a post-modern setting. So, there are things to be read carefully here.

Perhaps the authors were not given enough space to develop their topics. Yet I would have welcome someone engaging with James William McClendon Junior

and his ilk as they suggest there are aspects of the Anabaptist heritage which need recovering by contemporary Baptist and baptistic groupings. So, I would like to suggest a project beyond this project. How about someone (the Study and Research Division of the BWA?) commissioning an international volume on Baptist convictions and identity which both wrestles with our past - are we only drawn from the English separatist tradition or is part of the Anabaptist story our story? - with the contemporary global and diverse expression of Baptist life and with whether, indeed, we are just a loose sub-grouping in the reformed tradition, or are we, in fact, another family altogether, as McClendon and others now suggest?

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**Robert R. Kershaw**, *Baptised Believers: Lincolnshire Baptists in times of persecution, revolution and toleration 1600-1700*, 1996, 43pp, from the author, 5 Smithfield, North Thoresby, Grimsby, DN36 5RU, £6-00 inc p&p.

Lincolnshire has been under-represented in Baptist regional studies. With its large parishes, scattered settlements and insular communities, the county exhibited many of the factors Alan Everitt (quoted by the author) asserts made fertile ground for strong rural Dissent - certainly Samuel Wesley found Epworth hard going at the end of the seventeenth century - yet individuals also had a decisive influence on the outcome of the story. Baptist historians are faced with their own enigma: Particular Baptists were later arrivals in Lincolnshire but from the beginning General Baptists took root. This is the context that Robert Kershaw explores in this work, originally an MA thesis.

The text follows neither congregation nor chronology but alternates personalities and communities, so we have Lincoln and Axholme churches alongside Hanserd Knollys, Samuel Oates and Thomas Grantham (why does he not have a modern biographer?). Clear maps are a good asset. From a careful study of wills, particularly illustrated in the Lincoln church membership, the author brings to light absorbing details about the wealth and social position of individuals, of family networks and the mutual confidence which extended to financial matters. The least satisfactory material is on Hanserd Knollys - I remain unpersuaded that a Calvinist Puritan who only came to Baptist convictions in the 1640s could influence the establishment of Arminian Baptist congregations in the 1630s.

This booklet contains new information and suggests that further study would be rewarded. The author's knowledge and enthusiasm for his subject and county are apparent from the prose and it is to be hoped that he will take encouragement to build on the foundations that he has laid to tell us more, perhaps about the effect that Thomas Grantham, Joseph Hooke and others had as Messengers upon the progress of the Lincolnshire Baptists.

**STEPHEN COPSON**